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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 KUALA LUMPUR 001551

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [MY](#)

SUBJECT: ABBAS VISITS MALAYSIA, PM ABDULLAH WELCOMES CHANCE
TO JOIN PEACE TALKS

REF: A. KUALA LUMPUR 417

[1](#)B. KUALA LUMPUR 467

Classified By: Political Section Chief Mark D. Clark for reasons 1.4 (b
, d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas visited Kuala Lumpur October 20 - 21, accompanied by Information Minister Riyad al Maliki and two other senior Palestinian officials as part of a tour of Muslim countries to seek support ahead of the U.S.-sponsored Middle East peace conference next month. While in Kuala Lumpur, Abbas met with Malaysian Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi and Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar. In a much publicized press conference, PM Abdullah urged the Palestinian President to solve the differences between Fatah and Hamas and to present a united position in their negotiations for peace. Abbas called on Hamas to end their "coup" in Gaza and pledged that only afterwards the two sides could talk. Abdullah stated during the Abbas visit that he had been invited as OIC Chair to participate in the Annapolis peace conference, and the Prime Minister promised to fully support the Palestinian cause of statehood during the peace talks. Abdullah's possible participation in peace talks would match Malaysia's desire to have role in Middle East peacemaking and would pay domestic political dividends for Abdullah given ethnic Malays' fixation on the Palestine issue. Action request: Embassy requests Department information on the invitation for Prime Minister Abdullah to join the Annapolis peace conference. End Summary.

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Kuala Lumpur

[1](#)2. (U) Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas visited Kuala Lumpur October 20 - 21, accompanied by Information Minister Riyad al Maliki and two other senior Palestinian officials as part of a tour of Muslim countries to seek support ahead of the U.S.-sponsored Middle East peace conference next month. The Palestinian President held bilateral talks with Prime Minister Abdullah Badawi who is also the current OIC Chair. This was Abbas' first working visit to Malaysia since being elected President in January 2005. At a joint press conference on October 20, Abbas stated that his discussions with Abdullah focused on important issues including bilateral ties and on the conference scheduled to be held in Annapolis, Maryland. He added, "We discussed in particular the details of the meeting that will take place between Palestine and Israel and between my country and the U.S. administration." He added that they discussed the need to coordinate efforts to achieve a peaceful, lasting and just resolution to the conflict. The Palestinian President explained that Palestine

was looking for the right coordinating mechanism to achieve the best outcome. He announced that Malaysia was invited to the conference as the Chair of the 57-member OIC, and "we seek help to coordinate efforts in order to achieve a peaceful resolution" and wanted to achieve, "a united position about the conference" with other countries including Malaysia. He also thanked Abdullah and the Malaysian people "for the continuous support towards the Palestinian struggle."

Malaysia to back Palestine

13. (U) At the same press conference, Abdullah stated that his discussions with Abbas were a continuation of their talks at the UN General Assembly last month. He added that "several indications" were made that Malaysia would be invited to the conference even though the dates have yet to be fixed. (Note: State News Agency Bernama reported October 20 that Abdullah had received the invitation and quoted the PM, "I am thankful for the invitation to participate in the conference." End note.) He added, "There is a good support for Malaysia's participation" and reiterated Malaysia's support for the Palestinian cause. He told the Palestinian President, "Our commitment to support the struggle of the Palestinian people remains as strong as ever. When we go there (Annapolis), we will fully support your cause." The Prime Minister also pointed out that Israel and the Palestinians must be brought together to accept any peace settlement. He added, "It is more important that Palestine is recognized as one state" and that "resolutions are solutions for peace in the Middle East."

14. (U) Abdullah reiterated his position that, "The Palestinian issue stands as one of the root causes of Muslim states' instability and tension. It is a problem that has

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affected the East and West as well as the relationship between the Christians and Muslims." "Some of the problems can be resolved if a peaceful resolution is achieved," he said.

15. (U) On the animosity between the Abbas' government in the West Bank and Hamas authorities in Gaza, Abdullah stressed that the Palestinians themselves should address it. Describing the problems as an internal matter "that have cropped up between brothers," Abdullah stated that such internal problems were not for anyone else to solve or interfere in. However, Abdullah also stated that he had stressed to Abbas the importance of Palestine taking a stand as one, undivided country at any peace negotiation. He said, "We do not want anyone to say or make reference that Palestine is not united. The problems faced are internal, between its people, between brothers and parties." Abbas responding to a similar question and on how Israel and the US view the inclusion of Hamas in a future Palestinian state retorted October 21, "This is none of their business, it is an internal Palestinian matter."

Peace with Israel Possible

16. (U) Speaking to local news editors prior to his departure to Jakarta on October 21, Abbas stated that the Palestinians are ready to implement the "road map" for peace with Israel and are now preparing the documents to be presented at the Middle East conference next month. Abbas added that documents will be based on the peace plan first outlined by President George Bush in 2002 calling for the creation of an independent Palestinian state living side by side with Israel in peace. The Palestinian document will also be based on the Arab Peace Initiative which calls for normalization of relations between Arab countries and Israel "if and it's a big IF Israel withdraws from Arab and Palestinian land it has occupied since 1967."

¶7. (U) Elaborating on the documents to be presented at the conference, Abbas stated that both Palestine and Israel had established their own terms to draft them based on six major issues namely the status of Jerusalem, the return of Palestinian refugees, Israel observing pre-1967 borders, water, settlements and security. He reiterated that East Jerusalem "is part of the Palestinian territories but was occupied since 1967 and it should be returned to the Palestinian state" adding that the Palestinian people would not accept anything short of this. Abbas explained that both sides are working intensively to reach agreement on all these issues, adding that both sides would work on the details after the conference for about six months before concluding a treaty. National news agency Bernama reported Abbas as stating that the objective was to conclude a peace treaty between Palestine and Israel before President Bush ends his term as US President in January 2009.

¶8. (U) Responding to a question on whether he was confident that the conference would achieve the desired outcome, Abbas replied that he did not expect the solutions to come easily. He stated, "There should be obstacles. If there are no obstacles, it means that we can solve the problem easily" adding that the fact the conflict had dragged on for decades showed that it was difficult to resolve. However, he pointed out that now is the opportunity "not only for the Palestinians but also for the Israelis to attain peace and stability."

¶9. (U) On the dispute between his Fatah faction and Hamas, where Abdullah had also expressed concern to the Palestinian President, Abbas stated that he wanted Hamas to be in the fold and not out in the opposition. He stated, "we know they won the election, unfortunately they staged a coup d'etat in Gaza." He added, "It's very difficult but either directly or indirectly through a third party, we are telling Hamas to revoke their coup then we will talk with them."

Taking a dig at Hamas

¶10. (U) Abbas also commented on the tendency of the international media to label him as "secularist" (Muslim but not Islamist leader) as compared to his rival, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh. Abbas dismissed the "secularist" description as simplistic. He stated, "I am not a secularist. I am a religious person and a good Muslim" and taking a dig at Hamas, he added, "I don't have to be with Hamas to be a good Muslim. Even if you're in Hamas you're not necessarily a

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good Muslim." He added his struggle for Palestinian nationalism and liberation does not contradict Islam.

Comment

¶11. (C) Despite Malaysia's friendly public reception of Hamas earlier this year (see refs A and B on Hamas' March 2007 visit to Kuala Lumpur), Malaysia has continued to side with Fatah over Hamas, embraced Abbas' leadership role in Palestine, quietly condemned Hamas' coup in Gaza, and privately expressed concern over Hamas' growing influence. While it is unclear Malaysia has much to offer in terms of facilitating a realization of a peace settlement, Malaysia's positive reaction to the possibility of its inclusion in the Annapolis conference matches its desire to have a role in Middle East peacemaking. Earlier this year, Malaysia jumped at the chance of joining the short-lived Pakistan-led initiative on Middle East peace, which brought in other non-Arab Muslim-majority states. Abdullah has long held that peace in Palestine is the key to peace between Islam and the West, and joined others calling for a role for non-Arab Muslim leaders in solving this issue critical to the broader Muslim world. Palestine is a major and emotional issue in

domestic Malaysian politics with the key Malay-Muslim majority of voters. If Abdullah were able to sit at a peace conference table, this would represent a strong boost to his UMNO party in the run-up to Malaysia's national elections. As a matter of longstanding policy, Malaysia has made it clear that it will not consider diplomatic relations with Israel until there is a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians. Embassy will pursue meetings with the Foreign Ministry on the subject of the Abbas visit and Abdullah's comments regarding Annapolis.

¶12. (SBU) Action request: Embassy requests Department information on the invitation for Prime Minister Abdullah to join the Annapolis peace conference.
KEITH